

H. Mahadevan, Deputy General Secretary, AITUC (Delhi)

Name	H. MAHADEVAN Deputy General Secretary, AITUC. HAL and others.
Date of Interview	The interview was conducted over a period of three days from 12 th March 2002; second session on 13 th March 2002; 15 th May 2002.
Time	First session – 3.40 pm onwards, Second session – 12.00 pm to 1.30 pm. and Third Session – 2.00 pm onwards
Place	AITUC Head Office, Delhi.
Context	The interview was conducted over three days and in the AITUC head office. H. Mahadevan is a senior leader of AITUC and he is a articulate trade unionist and prolific in his writings. His knowledge of trade unions and activism stretches from the sophisted trade union in highly technical industries like HAL to peoples struggles in Karnataka where he is recognized as a big name in the political and trade union world. He is a simple and honest man and always on the move that is why our interview got stretched over three days. He is a very educated trade unionist and very widely traveled in the international trade union movement.
Interviewers	Bobby Poulouse

Biographical Sketches

He was born on 5th March 1941 in an orthodox family in Kanyakumari district then in Kerala presently in Tamil Nadu. After his education in Tamil Nadu and Jodhpur he joined Air Force in the technical side at the Air Force Flying College in Jodhpur. There he became an EC member of the HAL union for the first time and for his activities he was transferred to Bangalore. There he got involved in the trade union movement completely. In the 1978 strike at HAL he was suddenly made the general secretary after a bad settlement arrived by the previous leadership which resigned. Then once Mahadevan took over he burnt the old agreement and launched a 72 days strike from 26th December 1980. In it all the other public sector units of Bangalore were also organized the peasants, students, teachers and all other sections. There was huge mobilization and section 144 all over Bangalore city. On 21st January 1981 three workers died due to police firing. It was a historic strike and it achieved most of its goals. HAL has been Mahadevan's base. Apart from that he has worked at building unions in Amco Batteries, and all kinds of industries all over south as well as he fought for public causes like price rise. He also worked in WFTU TUIs and of late he is focussing on safety and environment.

Transcript Summary

H. Mahadevan began his interview by saying that he was born on 5th March 1941 in an orthodox family in Kanyakumari. He is originally from Kerala from where his parents migrated. Mahadevan said that he did his education in Tamil Nadu after which he did his intermediate in Jodhpur (Rajasthan). He obtained his masters degree in political science from Mysore University. Mahadevan's father was driver thus he came from a lower middle class family. In his school days itself he got attracted to the "Self Respect Movement of E.V. Ramaswamy Naiker i.e. Periyar.

Mahadevan joined the Air Force in the technical side. His first started working at the Air Force Flying College in Jodhpur. There he for the first time got involved in trade union work. At the young age of 24 due his good work in the HAL union he was made General Secretary of the biggest trade union in Bangalore i.e. of HAL. Mahadevan narrated the circumstances in which he was made the General Secretary of the HAL as the then union leadership led an unplanned strike which ended in a bad settlement and the leadership got changed and Mahadevan was made the leader. It was in these difficult circumstances that he took over the leadership. Within six months Mahadevan started the process of the revival of the union and burnt the settlement arrived at by the previous union.

After that Mahadevan built up a joint front of all the public sector trade unions by forming a Coordination Committee of the central public sector trade unions in Bangalore. It was previously called the Joint Action Council and now it was renamed Joint Action Front. A national level front of the public sector trade unions of nine states was also formed.

In 1980 Mahadevan as Convenor of the Joint Action Front of the CPSTU and also the General Secretary of the HAL union and mobilized over 1,25,000 employees employed in the 8 major central PSUs spread over 9 states. The main demand of the 1980 public sector strike was implementation of the parity clause of the 1978 settlement. The strike began on 26th December 1980 and lasted for 72 days. Mahadevan said he was arrested and three persons died due to police firing on 21st January 1981. It was a historic mobilization in the sense that the peasantry from around outside Bangalore city from the rural Karnataka also came in support of the strike. Solidary was demonstrated by other sections like the teachers, students and youth also. There was Section 144 throughout Bangalore city and they collected donations from public who donated wholeheartedly for the fees of the children of the workers. More than 2000 criminal cases were filed against the activists. Mahadevan narrated how after release from jail they were again immediately

arrested. The Congress government tried to divide the workers in the name of Tamils, Malayalis etc. as well tried to cut off the water and electricity of the workers' township.

This strike was historic and Mahadevan's role was crucial as the main leader. In a way it was a high point for him. After this strike Mahadevan was active as a trade unionist in various unions e.g. Amco Batteries and various other industries in Karnataka and south. In Amco Batteries Mahadevan and his colleagues went on 11 days hunger strike. Apart from this he has been active in several public causes like price rise and on 30th June 1973 he along with others mobilized all the working class to force a complete closure of Bangalore city.

Later Mahadevan while continuing his work moved to the national leadership of AITUC as it Deputy General Secretary and also moved to WFTU and is associated with several TUIs like Engineering & Metal. He has published prolific number of articles on many issues. Of late he is focussing a lot on Safety and Environment issues of the trade union movement.